DECEMBER 1953

HUGO GERNSBACK, *Editor*

Science-Fiction plus

preview of the future

complete short novel

THE TRIGGERED DIMENSION
by HARRY BATES
(author of "Death of a Sensitive.")

+

THE TRANS-HUMAN
by Murray Leinster

+

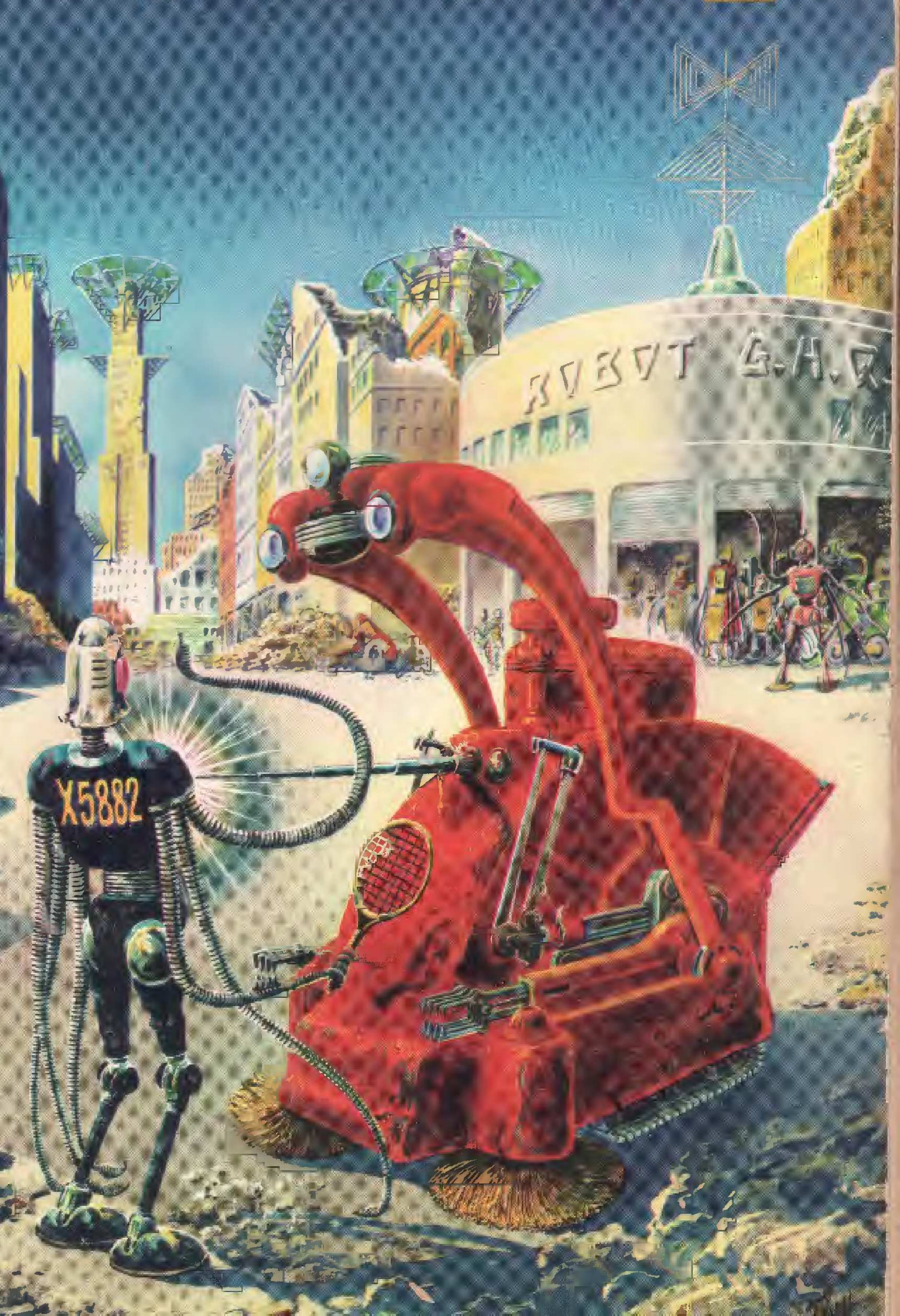
BITTER END
by Eric Frank Russell

+

THE VAMPIRATE
(a novelette)
by James H. Schmitz

+

many other stories



35¢

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NEXT ISSUE

THE MALIGNANT WHITE

by

Murray Leinster

The stand-out feature of our next issue will be a complete short novel by the master science-fiction story teller, Murray Leinster. *The Malignant White* is a dramatic story of space-adventure, with the flavor and verve that gives good science-fiction its special appeal, and physical and philosophical aspects that add richness to the tale.

Leinster has taken some of the most provocative elements of space travel and combined them to form a solid and satisfying tale of interplanetary travel. Shipwreck on an unknown world; relics of a once mighty civilization; evidence that intelligent menace still persists; strange creatures in the Weinbaum tradition, and most baffling of all, the incredible mystery of The Malignant White. All these elements, combined with adroit craftsmanship add up to royal science-fiction entertainment.

+

SCIENCE-FICTION+ has made it a consistent policy to keep many of its outstanding stories and features a surprise. You will be pleased when you open the next issue of SCIENCE-FICTION+ and note the choice science-fiction which has been compiled to please the discriminating reader.

Science-Fiction plus

preview of the future

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$100.00 will be paid by this magazine for each Short-Short Science-Fiction Story. These stories must be *real* science-fiction, not fantasy, and should not run over 1,000 words. The Short-Short + will occupy one full page.



This design, symbolizing science-fiction, is displayed with all stories of a serious scientific-technical trend. Such stories contain new scientific ideas which are certain to be realized in the future.

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bitter end

by **ERIC FRANK RUSSELL**

THE SHIP dropped out of the sky with little noise other than that of its last braking blasts. Nor was it visibly spectacular because it came in the glare of the sun. Describing a shallow angle it neared the surface and let go a dozen bangs from its nose, hit sand with its belly and slid to a stop.

An expert eye could have seen at a glance that it was no ordinary moon-rocket such as flamed between Earth and satellite five times a week. It was longer, thinner, racier. Close inspection would have revealed it more worn, battered, and neglected than any moon-rocket was permitted to be.

Originally it had been golden but now most of the plating was scraped away in fine, longitudinal stripes. Tiny missiles of great hardness and incredible velocity had scored the armor from end to end. In seventeen places they had pierced it like needles going through the rind of a cheese. Seventeen tiny air-leaks had been plugged with a special gun firing bullets of near-molten lead.

The ship had the pitiful air of something whacked almost to death, like a maltreated horse. It lay exhausted on the desert sand, its tubes cooling for the last time, its casing showing a few dim hairlines of gold-like remnants of departed glory.

Vaguely discernible near the tail were coppery traces of the vessel's identification number: M.1. A number once to be conjured with. A number to fill the world's television screens and thrill the minds of millions. Newspapers still nursed typeset heads in four-inch letters featuring that identification.

M.1. COMES BACK.

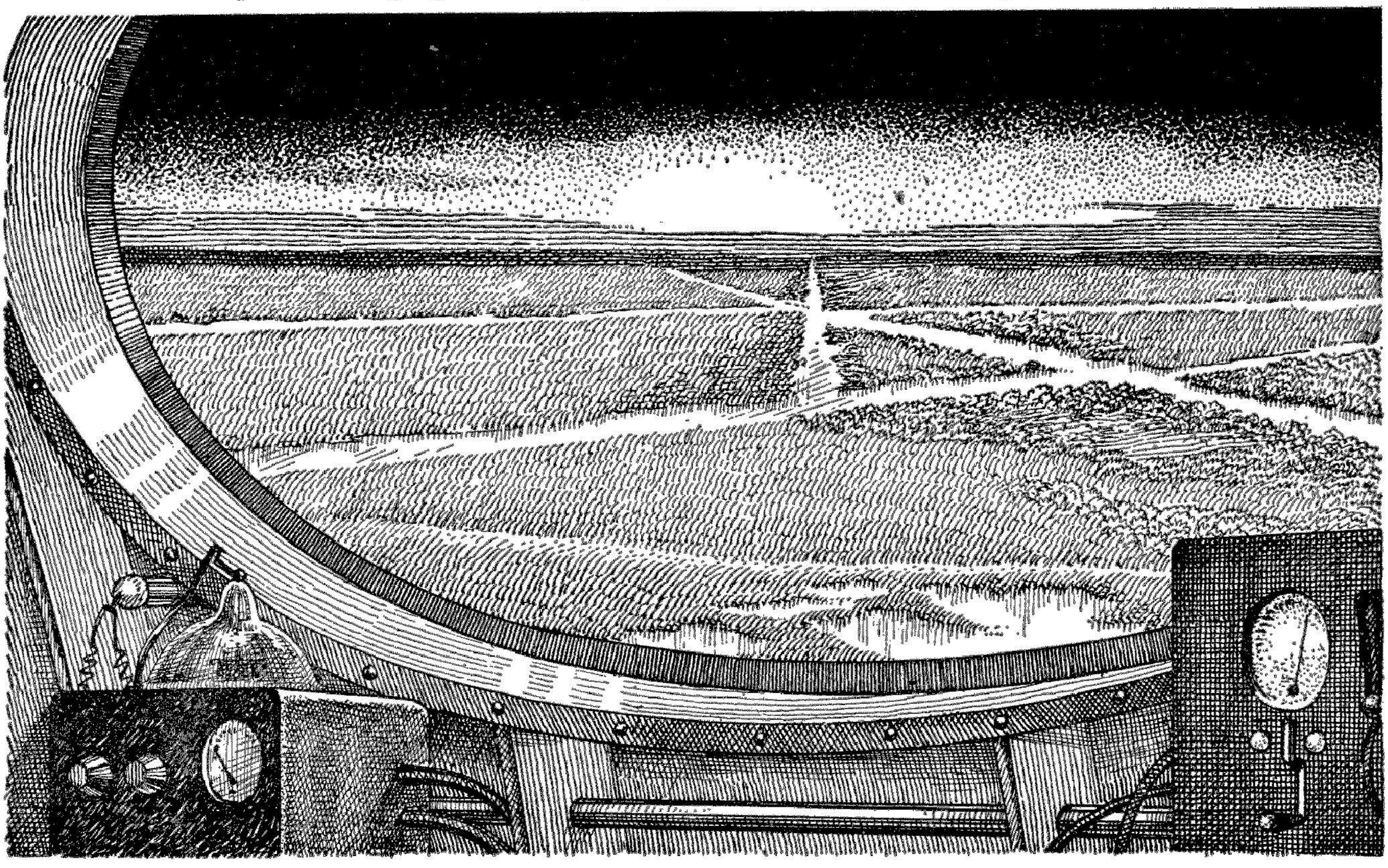
They'd not had the opportunity to use it. M.1. was out of time and place. The proper time lay many months back. The proper place was Luna City spaceport whence it had departed. Not here, lying in the desert like a corpse escaped from its grave. Not here with none to witness save the lizards and Gila monsters, the scrubwood, cacti, and tortured Joshua trees.

The man who came out the airlock was not better preserved than his ship. Gaunt, with hollow cheeks and protruding cheekbones, skinny arms and legs. His eyes had the luminous shine of the feverish. Yet he was active enough. He could get around fine provided it was at his own pace. That pace had three speeds: leisurely, slow, and dead-slow.

James Vail, thirty-three, test pilot first-class. Thirty-three? He brushed thin fingers through long, tangled hair, knew that he felt like sixty and probably looked it. So much the better. The sharp-eyed and inquisitive would pass him by, fooled by his appearance of agedness. With all their resources the powers-that-be would find it hard to trace a man who had aged enough to be his own father.

He left the ship without a qualm or so much as a backward glance. With respect to the vessel and its contents, his conscience was clear. World scientists would find precisely what they wanted within that exhausted cylinder. All was arranged in readiness for them: The samples, records, photographs, meterings, the cogent data. He had been meticulous about that. He had followed the line of duty to the last, the very last. There was nothing missing—save the crew.

A road ran seven miles to the north. He had landed the ship strategically, as near as he dared but safely concealed behind a long ridge. Now he set forth to reach the road, scuffling the sand like a stumblebum,



Most great men understand that they must pay a price for success; and the plaudits of masses, if attained, generally helps to overcome any bitterness cultivated by past suffering. But sometimes success is obtained at so great a cost that a man may desire nothing more than to lose himself in the anonymity of the masses. Eric Frank Russell tells of one successful man who felt that way. The survivor of the first round-trip to Mars, and his reasons for self-effacement, provide the basis of a story that is a tense suspenseful shocker.

(Illustrated by Lawrence)

resting many times on the way, sweating profusely.

Traffic was sparse and the wait for a hitch likely would be prolonged. That, too, could be regarded as advantageous in that it reduced the chance of some passer-by having seen the ship swooping in the distance.

In due time a big green sedan showed up, ignored his thumb, and roared past with a rush of wind and a scatter of hot grit. Without resentment he resumed his seat on the boulder. In the next couple of hours eight cars and a creaking feed-wagon pretended that he was not there. Eventually a huge red truck stopped and picked him up.

"Where ya for?" asked the driver, putting the truck in gear and letting it lumber forward.

James Vail settled himself comfortably in the cab, said, "Doesn't matter much. Any place where I can get a train."

The driver glanced at his passenger's hands, noted blue veins and swollen knuckles.

"Down on your luck, chum?"

"Not really. I've been sick."

"You look it."

Vail smiled wryly. "Some folks look worse than they are."

"How come you got stranded out here in the wilds?"

That was an awkward one. He thought it over, knowing that his mind was working with unaccustomed slowness.

"I was dumped six or seven miles back. I've been walking quite a piece. Nobody would give me a lift. Probably thought I'd try to stick them up."

"That happens," agreed the driver. "I've got a sweet way of messing up such tricks, don't you worry."

He didn't offer details of his special technique . . . evidently it was intended only as a warning. He was a big man, red-faced and tough, but amiable. The type who could strangle in defense—or give his own dinner to a hungry dog.

"A trucker can pick up trouble any time the day or night," the driver confided. "A hundred miles back there was a flashy dame on the curb waving like crazy. Oh-o, I says, and beats it straight past. I been on this route before, see, and—"

He continued his reminiscences for an hour while Vail lolled by his side and filled occasional pauses with monosyllabic assurances that he was listening. The truck trundled into a small town. Vail sat erect, studying its shops. His tongue licked across thin, pale lips.

"Reckon this place will do me."

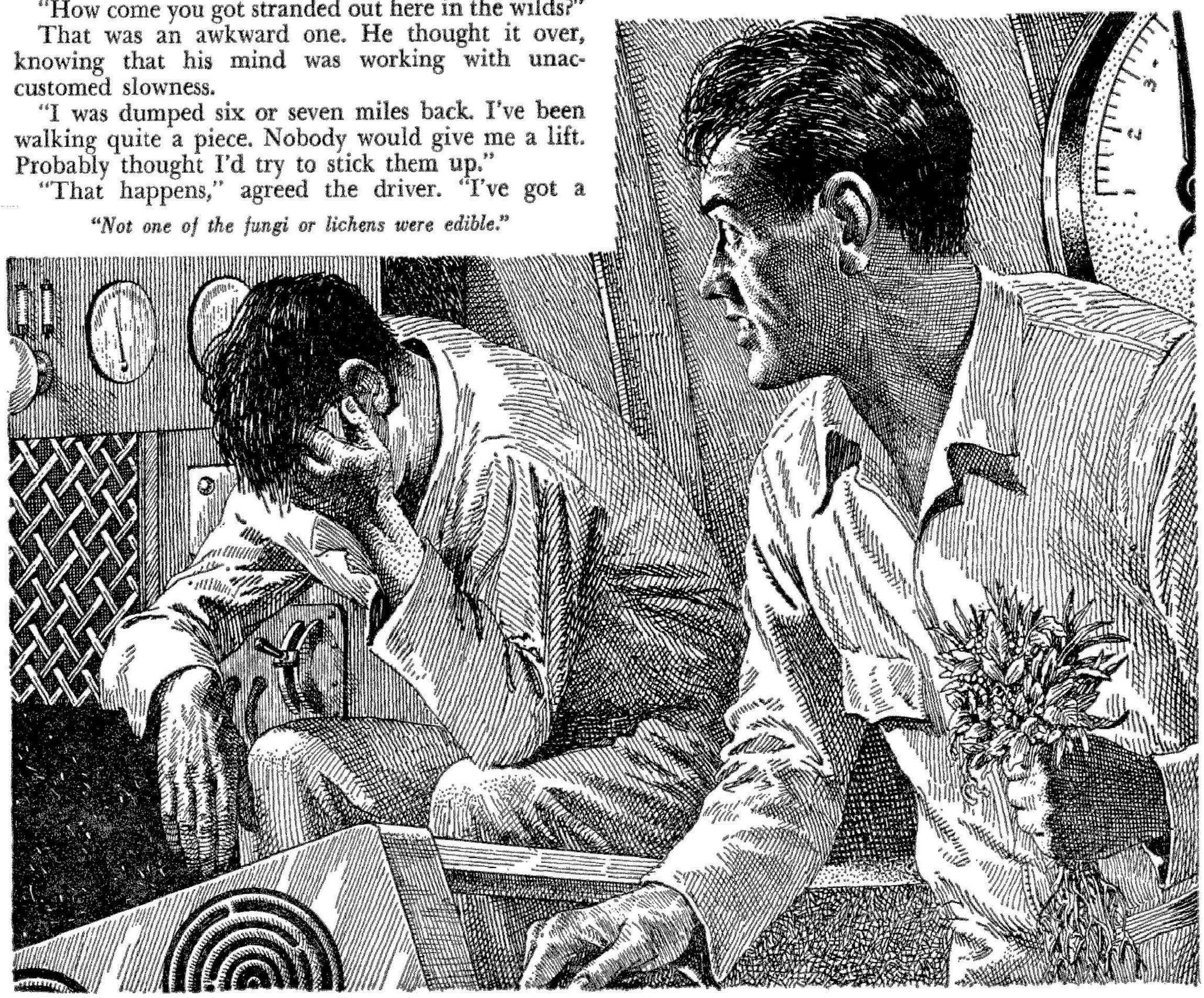
"You're forty miles from the railhead yet," the driver pointed out.

"Near enough. I'll make it later."

The truck stopped. Vail got down, moving stiffly.

"Thanks, brother. I appreciate the favor."

"Think nothing of it." The other waved a friendly hand and tooled his load away.



"Not one of the fungi or lichens were edible."



Eric Frank Russell, despite the grimness of this present story, is personally notable for his wit and outstanding sense of humor. Though science-fiction writing has never been more then an avocation to him, this Britisher is generally rated as being close to the top writers in the field. A volume of his more outstanding short stories is scheduled to appear shortly from Fantasy Press.

Vail stood on the sidewalk and watched the crimson bulk roll from sight. Just as well not to stay with that too long, he thought. A trail is harder to follow when breaks are frequent and erratic. In due time his would be picked up and every effort would be made to trace it through. Nothing was surer than that.

They would find the ship later today or perhaps tomorrow or even the day after. In these modern times air-traffic was heavy enough to ensure that some observant pilot would notice the grounded rocket and report it. State police would go and take a look at it, recognize it, call in the scientists.

From that moment the hunt would be on. Police spotter-planes scouring the desert. Police cars tearing along the roads. Vehicles halted over a wide area and drivers questioned.

"Did you go past that point? At what time? Did you see anything extraordinary? Did you notice a couple of fellows hanging around?"

Sooner or later a car or motorcycle would stop a big red truck.

"You did, eh? About ten-thirty? What was he like? Where did he say he was going? Where did you drop him?"

A phone-call back to this town and the local law would be out in force trying to pick up the new lead.

Yes, they'd be looking for him all right. Puzzled over his importance since there would be no criminal charge entered against him. But they'd obey orders and look, wanting him badly, moving fast and far.

Well, they weren't going to find him.

HE ENTERED a cheap restaurant down a side-street. In here, of all places, he must control himself, behaving casually enough to draw no undue attention. Finding a vacant table, he sat at it, consulted the menu with artificial boredom. It was a hell of an effort.

A blond and blowsy waitress came, flicked invisible crumbs from the table, awaited his order. Her eyes softened as she studied him, finding him a distinct change from the daily horde of guzzlers. He seemed to appeal to her suppressed maternal instincts.

"Ham and eggs," he said.

She weighed him up again. She asked, "Double?"

Biting back the response he wanted to make, he forced himself to say, "No—I'll have pie to follow."

It took a few minutes. He waited in patience, closing his eyes from time to time, compelling his mind to disregard sizzling sounds and appetizing odors issuing from the kitchen.

The load she brought made him suspect that she had taken matters into her own hands. If this were an ordinary serving, what was a double helping like? It alarmed him a little. It meant, perhaps, that she had got the measure of him and therefore would remember him.

Trackers follow the trail with the aid of people who find cause to remember the seemingly ordinary.

He must eat and get out of here with the minimum of delay. Yet he could not show indecent haste. So he picked up his knife and fork, shuddered slightly as he felt them in his fingers. Then slowly he got through the plateful, savoring every morsel and pretending not to notice the waitress watching him from the far end.

The moment he had finished she was back at the table, removing the plate and eyeing him inquiringly.

"No pie," he said. "You gave me too much. Just coffee."

Momentary puzzlement showed in her features. Somewhere her calculations had gone wrong. Shows you can't judge folks by appearances, she decided. The longer one lives the more one learns.

Vail drank his coffee in easy sips, paid, and went out. He did not turn to see whether her gaze was upon him as he departed. Behave normally at all times, insisted his mind. Behave normally.

With the same unhurried air he strolled along the street, crossed a main artery, found another modest eating place. He went inside, had two large servings of pie and another coffee.

A-a-ah! that was better. Next call gained him a pack of cigarettes. He lit up and inhaled in the manner of one tasting the joys of paradise. Near the shop a long-distance bus pulled into a stop and an old lady with luggage struggled aboard. Vail managed a sudden sprint that would have been beyond him a short while ago. Clambering in, he found a seat near the front.

Trail-break number two.

AT THE END of three weeks he had settled himself seventeen hundred miles from M.1. Sheer distance provided a margin of safety no matter how temporary. He had a room in a dilapidated but adequate boarding-house, a job in a factory. Trainee welder, they called him. From a test pilot to trainee welder. He'd come down like a rocket.

Doubtless he could find employment better than that, something more suited to his capabilities, if he looked around long enough. But the two hundred dollars with which he had landed had slowly and surely dribbled away. Anything would do to keep him going pending appearance of other and better opportunities.

His looks had changed over these three weeks and he now bore reasonably close resemblance to the picture on his pilot license. Cheeks had filled out, arms and legs had thickened, hair had grown thicker and darker. His name also had changed. The factory filing system had him indexed as Harry Reber, forty-two, single and unattached.

Security of a job did not provide mental ease. He could not escape consciousness of the falsity of his position. Fellow-workers emphasized it almost every hour of every day. They would bawl, "Harry!" and frequently he would fail to respond and they would notice the failure. With the swift appreciation of men who toil they recognized him as one several cuts above his present station. They made mental note of the fact that none of his conversation revealed any significant thing about himself. There was a mystery about him sometimes discussed in desultory manner when he wasn't around. Left-wingers theorized that he was a stool-pigeon for the bosses. Others suspected a prison record.

All this could have been avoided and the square peg neatly fitted into a square hole by seeking a post with the moonboats. Pilots were always wanted there, especially top-graders. But the hunters knew that too. They'd be waiting for just such a move and ready with a countermove of their own.

"James Vail? I am a Federal officer. It is my duty to—"

Hah! He would not give them the chance. Duty

they'd call it to drag him where he did not want to go. What did they really know of duty? He had done his own duty according to his lights as best he could in terrible circumstances. Let that be enough and more than enough. Let him live in peace and obscurity without being crucified for the sake of other, lesser duties.

Every morning and evening when going to or from work he bought the latest paper, scanned the headlines. Then at the first opportunity he'd go right through it page by page, column by column. He grabbed one this evening, took it to his room, studied it from front to back.

Nothing about M.1. Not a solitary word. Yet they must have found it by now. They must want the crew. Nevertheless nothing had been issued to the press.

Why this secrecy?

It occurred to him as a somewhat remote and rather ridiculous possibility that those equipped to deal with the data on the ship might question its authenticity, might be unable to define it as true or false. Somebody with a strong imagination might have ventured the notion that it was all an elaborate hoax.

Though far-fetched, such a theory would explain the missing crew. They hadn't landed. They had never arrived. They had suffered some indescribable fate and something else had brought the ship home, something nonhuman and now running loose, God knows where. Or, alternatively, the crew had brought back the ship while possessed by parasitic masters now roaming the Earth with their human hosts.

Fantastic and not a little stupid—but if journalists managed to brew up such ideas for the sake of sensationalism they would scare the living daylights out of the public. Silence alone could prevent a wholesale stampede.

He shrugged fatalistically, fished out of his case a tattered newspaper rescued from a junkshop several days ago. Laying on his bed he opened it for the umpteenth time, absorbed the front page. Every time he did this he marveled at how quickly bygone events fade from public memory. Today the main subject of interest was the final stage of the Scarpilo murder trial. Probably not one person in court could recall the names of those who had made the headlines in this sheet dated almost two years back.

M.1. TAKES OFF.

Luna City. 9.0. GMT. The first ship to Mars roared into an airless sky and vanished precisely at deadline this morning. Pilot James Vail and Copilot Richard Kingston are on their way. By the time this report reaches the streets the long arm of Mankind will be extended many thousands of miles into the cosmos.

And so it went on and on and on. Pages full of it. Pictures of Vail, dark-haired and solemn. Pictures of Kingston, fair, curly, and grinning like a cat that has swiped the cream. Pictures of the President pressing the button that banged-off the boat by remote control. Articles by scientists about the men, the ship, and the equipment. Essays on how they'd cope with Martian conditions, what they hoped to discover.

A nine-day wonder. It had remained no more than that until the ship was due back. Then the papers and public interest had perked up again.

M.1. EXPECTED SOON.

More pictures, more articles, more anticipatory huzzahs. A coming thunderclap in human history. Nothing happened. The ominous note sounded two or three weeks later with the vessel that much overdue. It built up over the next month. It ended with grim acceptance of disaster. M.1. was no more. Vail and Kingston had paid for Mars just as twenty had paid with their lives for the moon. *Requiescat in pace.*

And better luck next time.

He wondered whether the tardy return of M.1. had delayed or accelerated that same next time. Nothing he had read so far had made mention of any M. 2. The authorities had a habit of keeping such things quiet until the last moment. However, it was most probable that up there high in the sky on Luna another ship was taking shape and two or possibly three men were preparing for a second assault on the Red Planet.

There lay a major reason for pursuit of himself. They wanted the story from his own lips. They would never be satisfied with what he had left them.

What had he left them? One, there was a complete record of the ship's flight performance outward and inward. Two, the story of the main driver tube's crack-up: how they'd repaired it and how long it had taken. Three, full details of equipment faults or inadequacies of which there had proved to be many.

Samples of Martian sand and bedrock, spa and quartz, plus flakes of lignite-like substance that were anisotropic and therefore of possible use to radar. Several 14-foot-long string-thin groundworms coiled into pickle-jars. Also suspended in formalin were a few of those harmless wrigglers that might be either true snakes or legless lizards. Eight species of bugs. Twenty-seven varieties of lichens. Thirty of tiny fungi. Nothing big, because Mars had no life-forms of any size. Possibly microscopes would turn up something.

And he'd left them general data in great quantity. Water-dispersion maps showing supplies sparse except within 200 miles of polar-cap rims. Gravitic, magnetic field, photon intensity, and numerous other measurements. Temperature records running between 30°C and minus 80°C. Atmosphere pressure meterings from .5 to .9 mm. Hg. Notes by the bookful and graphs by the yard. It had been done as thoroughly as mortal men could do it.

But it wasn't enough.

A small part of the tale had been left out and they'd want that too—in his own words.

To hell with them!

IN THE mid-morning ten days later the shop foreman yelled, "Harry!"

It went in one ear and out the other.

The foreman crossed the floor, nudged him. "You deaf or something? I just called you. You're wanted at the front office."

Vail cut off his flame with a faint pop, closed valves on gas cylinders, removed his helmet and dark glasses. He tramped along a checkerplate catwalk, down steel stairs to outside. Moving him to another part of the plant, he hazarded, or perhaps about to fire him. Reaching the corner, he turned toward the office which was constructed in the style of a glass house.

That was the hunters' first mistake: waiting in plain view. Their second was in choosing a uniformed cop to drop the heavy hand. Vail saw who was there before he could be seen. He turned again, moved swiftly into the alley alongside the girder shop, got to the farther end, made his way to the time office.

There he found his time card and punched out. The watchman on duty ostentatiously consulted the time and looked him over.

"Heck's up with you?"

"Going home."

"Who said you could?"

"If you don't like it go complain to the chief," Vail suggested.

He walked out, leaving the other disgruntled but

not inclined to take action. Going straight to his room, he packed, paid his bill, called a taxi. Although he did not know it, he escaped by little more than a minute. The taxi was hardly out of sight when two men arrived, checked the address, strolled in, and came out running. They snooped around the station half an hour after his train pulled out.

Wires hummed alongside four routes taken by locomotives during those thirty minutes. Distant bus stations were staked. Police cars and motorcycles prowled exit roads. Switchmen and brakemen searched assembled freight trains and marshaling-yards for roof-bedders and rod-riders. Life became a misery for a few toughs, tramps, and parolees.

They did not get Vail. His wits had perked up along with his body. He had a mind designed for split-second decisions and equally quick translation into action . . . a test pilot's mind accustomed to facing sudden and grave problems and snatching the surest way out.

Weeks ago, long weary weeks ago, he had weighed up a major crisis, dealt with it and thereby created his present fix, there being no alternative in sight. Now he was dealing with the result in the only possible way: by keeping on the run until he was forgotten . . . or caught. If they caught him he would surrender all they wanted. But they must catch him first. On the other hand, if he could avoid capture for long enough they might forget him or dismiss him as of no consequence. That could happen in time. His importance would shrink to well-nigh nothing if M.2. landed on Mars.

Eighty-five miles out, the train slowed at a crossing. A traveling circus was the cause of the delay. It had halted in a colorful, mile-long procession waiting for the train to pass. The engineer reduced speed to a crawl for the sake of a line of fidgety elephants at the head.

Everyone gaped through windows at the circus. By the time they looked back Vail was out the opposite side, case in hand. He got a lift on the tailboard of a lion cage, sharing it with an unshaven character who could take out his teeth and force his bottom lip right up over his nose.

Forty miles farther on he had a job. The carnival hit its pitch and he was hired as a stake-driver, rope-puller, and general factotum. He dragged heavy canvas until his finger-tips were raw, watched the Big Top rise, billowing and huge. He helped set up the ropes, ladders, and trapezes for the Flying Artellos; he addressed the Fat Lady as Daisy and the India Rubber Man as Herman. He learned to refer to lions as "cats" and elephants as "bulls."

Somehow or other he'd been traced to that factory —how, he did not know. Possibly by sheer persistent legwork on the part of many. That meant they were definitely after him; the chase was more than a mere expectation of his own. And that in turn meant that despite continued silence M.1. had been found.

Therefore he would have to keep breaking the trail, no matter how smooth and enticing any section of it might be. He must not succumb to the temptation to stay with the circus too long. Neither must he hang around in the next place or the next. "No rest for the wicked" was a truism being sweatily illustrated.

When the hunt keeps on the move, the fox can't sit forever in the covert.

HE FOUND work again a thousand miles eastward. He had crossed the continent. But he could not go further short of taking to the seas. That was an idea not to be discarded. Sailors pass out of reach for long periods and can be most difficult to trace, particularly if they jump ships in foreign ports.

For the time being he was satisfied with a checker's post on the loading-bay of a plant making cardboard containers. It paid modestly, enabled him to have a cheap apartment in a brownstone a mile away, and, above all, kept him concealed among the laboring hordes.

Eleven weeks had gone by since he'd thumbed that red truck, and still the television and the newspapers let out not a squawk. What discussions and arguments had taken place in official and scientific circles could be left to the imagination. The missing part of the story would have saved them a lot of breath, enabled them to see his problem and its sole solution. But those details were denied, leaving them with nothing but mystery.

Oh, the quandary he and Kingston had been compelled to contemplate. That busted driver and the weeks it consumed in putting right. The inevitability of planetary motions that can be slowed or halted for no man. The time that must be spent awaiting the next moment of vantage.

They'd filled a deal of that time making further and futile tests, raking Mars for what it had to offer and finding the cupboard appallingly bare. In his mind's eye he could see Kingston now, retching violently beside an overturned cooker. Not one of the thirteen fungi or twenty-seven lichens were edible. They could be swallowed fresh, boiled, baked, or fried and they went straight down and came straight up. leaving a man feeling ten times worse than before.

The question they'd had to answer was a very simple one, namely, whether to get the boat back at any cost or let it rot in the pink sands forever. Both knew there was only one response: M.1. must *return. It could be done and they knew how it could be done . . . but never on this side of heaven could they agree about how to apply the method. The solution was not one for calm, reasoned discussion; it was for prompt settlement in one way only.*

Brooding over these past things as he sat on the edge of his bed, he heard a knock, answered it without apprehension. Two men in plain clothes muscled through the open door.

The newcomers stood side by side, estimating him with hard, shrewd eyes. Yet a mite of uncertainty lay below their normal assurance. This was the first time in their experience that they'd been ordered to bring in a man without knowing the reason and without legal justification for arrest. Presumably he should be requested to come along as a special favor—and be carried out bodily if he refused. Anyway, this was one of the wanted pair. The other might not be far away.

"You're James Vail," said the older of the two. It was a statement, not a question.

"Yes."

No use denying it. The hunt had ended all too soon. The law's nation-wide net was more efficient and harder to evade than he'd ever believed.

Well, they'd got him. Lies might serve to delay the issue but never to avert it. Truth must out sooner or later. Get it over and done with. Get it off his mind. Strangely enough, he thought of that with a sense of vast relief.

"Where is Kingston?" demanded the other, hopefully.

James Vail stood up, hands dangling. He felt as if his belly was sticking out a mile with the whole world staring at it. The answer came in a voice scarcely recognizable as his own.

"I ate him." +